

Interpretation of 2 John 9

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This study should have been a part of my report on the Denver Unity Meeting, but preparation and delivery of ten lessons on Unity and Fellowship in the Los Angeles area October 3 to 10 made that impossible. Our problem is, does the expression "doctrine (teaching) of Christ" in 2 John 9 mean the teaching which Christ did personally and through his apostles, or does it mean teaching about the nature, deity, of Christ? Bro. Ketcherside spends a lot of time and effort to prove that the expression means the teaching concerning the person of Christ, that he is the Son of God, the Messiah. Since Bro. K. thinks error in doctrine can never be serious enough to justify the breaking of fellowship, he must hold that 2 John refers to a perversion of the gospel which denies the deity of Christ. I believe the term "doctrine (teaching) of Christ" in 2 John 9 means all that Jesus taught personally and through his apostles, all that God has spoken through his Son.

First, we notice what great scholars say about it. Thayer, defining the Greek word used here for doctrine, or teaching, "that which is taught, one's teaching, i.e., what he teaches, 2 Jno. 9." W. E. Vine defines the word to mean, "that which is taught." M. R. Vincent says, "Not the teaching concerning Christ, but the teaching of Christ himself and his apostles." H. A. W. Meyer says, "The doctrine which, proceeding from Christ, was proclaimed by the apostles. The doctrine of Christ is the truth; he who has not the truth has not God." A. Plummer, in Pulpit Commentary, says, "Whosoever goes beyond revealed truth and professes to teach something more profound." And A. T. Robertson, perhaps the greatest Greek scholar America has produced, says, "Not the teaching about Christ, but that of Christ which is the standard of Christian teaching as the walk of Christ is the standard for the Christian's walk (1 John 2:6)." It would be difficult to find seven names more highly respected among scholars in the field of the meaning of words than these men I have quoted. However, if it can be shown that their definition is out of harmony with New Testament usage, I am willing to throw them all out and give them no consideration. How is the phrase "doctrine (teaching) of Christ" used by the Holy Spirit?

First, let us notice some phrases very similar to this one under study. In Rev. 2:14, we have the "teaching of Balaam"; in Rev. 2:16, the "teaching of the Nicolaitans." Do these phrases mean the teaching about the parties named? Or do they mean the teaching done by these parties? Obviously the latter. If so, why do we not take the "teaching of Christ" to mean the teaching done by Christ; not the teaching about his nature.

Next, we have the "teaching of the Pharisees" (Matt. 16:12), the "teaching of the apostles" (Acts 2:42), and the "teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Is there any one who will say that these phrases mean teaching about the nature of the parties mentioned? And remember that Greek word for teaching (*didakee*—some spell it in English *didachee*) is the same word used in 2 John 9, and the grammatical construction of the phrase is identical. If these phrases mean the teaching done by the parties mentioned, why does not 2 John 9 mean the teaching done by Christ, either personally or through his apostles?

Next, we have a series of statements found in Matt. 7:28; Mark 4:2; 11:18; 12:38; and Luke 4:32 for study. The phrase in 2 John 9 reads, "the doctrine, or teaching (*tee didakee*) of Christ" (*tou Kristou*). The phrase in these passages reads, "his doctrine, or teaching." The Greek says "the doctrine, teaching, of him" (*tee didakee outou*). In Matt. 7:28, the "doctrine of him" refers to what he said in the Sermon on the Mount. This was not teaching about his deity, but general, practical, Christian living. If the "doctrine of him" in Matt. 7:28 refers to the doctrine Jesus taught, why does not "the doctrine of Christ" in 2 John 9 refer to what Jesus taught? By a study of each of the above references the reader will find that the phrase "his doctrine, teaching" in each one cannot be made to mean the doctrine about Christ, but what Christ

taught. John 18:19 and Acts 6:28 may be added to this list in spite of the fact that the genitive case is used instead of the dative.

In Col. 3:16, we have “Let the word of Christ dwell in you.” Here the phrase “the word of Christ” must refer to the same thing as “the doctrine of Christ” in 2 John 9. No one ever said “the word of Christ” in Col. 3:16 means the word concerning the nature, deity, of Christ. Why then should any one think “the doctrine of Christ” in 2 John 9 should be limited to mean the teaching concerning the deity of Christ?

We have one more occurrence of a similar phrase in 1 Tim. 6:3, where I think we have a parallel statement with that in 2 John 9. Notice the following parallel:

If any man – teaches different doctrine– consents not– to word of Christ– withdraw thyself.
Whosoever– goeth onward– abides not– in doctrine of Christ– hath not God.

You will notice there are five parts to each statement. “If any man” is identical with “whosoever.” The second pair “teaches different doctrine” and “goeth onward,” must mean the same. The third pair, “consents not” and “abides not,” mean the same thing. The fifth pair, “withdraw thyself” and “hath not God” are related because we must withdraw ourselves from all who have not God. When God breaks fellowship with a person, we are obligated to break fellowship with him or suffer our fellowship with God to be broken. Since four pairs of these phrases mean the same thing, who can deny that the other is parallel? The fourth pair, “words of Christ” and “doctrine of Christ,” are identical in meaning. But the context of 1 Tim. 6:3 forces us to take the phrase “words of Christ” in that verse to mean things which Jesus taught. In verse 2 Paul told Timothy to teach and exhort “these things.” Then he said if any man teaches anything different and will not consent to sound words, those spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to withdraw from him. Verses 1 and 2 identify “these things.”

The effort is made by Bro. K. and others to limit the meaning of “doctrine of Christ” in 2 John to teaching about the deity of Christ in order to fellowship all “sincere believers” regardless of their doctrine and practices. They want to accept all Baptists, Mormons with their baptism for the dead, all baptized Holiness groups with their tongue talking and miracle working tricks as being in the fellowship into which God calls the saved (1 Cor. 1:9). If the phrase “doctrine of Christ” means all that God has spoken through his Son (Heb. 1:2), this verse forbids us to accept such bodies of “sincere believers; as being in the fellowship. They are not in the fellowship because they have gone onward beyond the teaching of Christ and have not God. They teach a different doctrine, consent not to the sound. words of our Lord and the doctrine according to godliness, and we must withdraw ourselves from them (1 Tim. 6:5).

In opposition to this conclusion, these brethren urge the fact that we who do fellowship one another differ on important doctrines, such as divorce and remarriage, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, how to care for the destitute, and other things.

Since we differ on these, some one is teaching a different doctrine from that which Christ and his apostles taught. Why do we not draw the lines of fellowship on these questions? Admittedly this is a difficult question. And it is possible that we are not entirely consistent. But does our inconsistency disprove our interpretation of 2 John 9? To misinterpret a verse or scripture just to make it fit our loose habits in discipline is not likely to commend us to God or to those who have any respect for his holy word. Elders need to pay more attention to what we preachers teach, stop the mouths of those who teach false doctrine (Titus 1:11), and refuse fellowship to those who go beyond the teaching of Christ. This will bring up the subject of the ability of elders to do such work, but none can deny the soundness of the teaching.